1-5.2 Reflexivity

When we think about how meaning is situated in actual contexts of use, we quickly face an important property of language, a property I will call “reflexivity” (Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Hanks 1996; Heritage 1984; Gumperz and Levinson 1996).

This is the “magical” property of language.

2- We can see this property clearly by considering even so simple a dialogue as: “How are ya?, “Fine,” exchanged between colleagues in an office corridor. Why do they use these words in this situation?

Because they take the situation they are in to be but a brief and mundane encounter between acquaintances, and these are the “appropriate” words to use in such a situation.
But why do they take the situation to be thus? In part, because they are using just such words, and related behaviors, as they are.

• However, why do they take the situation to be thus? Largely because they are using just such words, and related behaviors, as they are.

3-Had the exchange opened with “What’s YOUR problem?,” the situation would have been construed quite differently.

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• As we saw before, we face, then, a chicken and egg question:

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• Which comes first? The situation or the language?

• This question reflects an important reciprocity between language and “reality”: language simultaneously reflects reality (“the way things are”) and constructs (construes) it to be a certain way.

4- While “reciprocity” would be a good term for this property of language, the more commonly used term is “reflexivity” (in the sense of language and context being like two mirrors facing each other and constantly and endlessly reflecting their own images back and forth between each other).

• In exchange, the term “reciprocity” has been used to describe the relationship between language and context, often in the context of social interaction. This model suggests that language and context are interdependent, with each affecting the other in a reciprocal manner. In this view, language is seen as a tool that reflects and shapes social reality, while social reality, in turn, influences the use of language. This interplay is often described as a process of constant reflection and feedback between language and social context.
5.3 Situations

5-Language then always simultaneously reflects and constructs the situation or context in which it is used (hereafter Gee will use the term “situation,” rather than “context,” because he wants to define it in a particular way). But what do we mean by a “situation”?

• The language always reflects a particular situation or context in which it is used (Gee will use the term “situation,” rather than “context,” because he wants to define it in a particular way). But what do we mean by a “situation”?

• Situations, when they involve communicative social interaction, always involve the following inextricably connected components or aspects (Hymes 1974; Ochs 1996):

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    1. A semiotic aspect, that is, the “sign systems,” such as language, gestures, images, or other symbolic systems (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996), and the forms of knowledge, that are operative and important here and now.

    2. Different sign systems and different ways of knowing have, in turn, different implications for what is taken as the “real” world, and what is taken as probable and possible, here and now, since it is only through sign systems that we have access to “reality.”

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7- An *activity* aspect, that is, the specific social activity or activities in which the participants are engaging; activities are, in turn, made up of a sequence of actions (Engestrom 1987, 1990; Leont’ev 1978; 1981; Wertsch 1998).


- A *material* aspect, that is, the place, time, bodies and objects present during interaction (Clark 1997; Latour 1991; Levinson 1996).

8- A *political* aspect, that is, the distribution of “social goods” in the interaction, such as, power, status, and anything else deemed a “social good” by the participants in terms of their cultural models and Discourses, e.g. beauty, intelligence, “street smarts,” strength, possessions, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995; Gee 1996; Luke 1995).

### 9

A sociocultural aspect, that is, the personal, social, and cultural knowledge, feelings, values, identities, and relationships relevant in the interaction, including, of course, sociocultural knowledge about sign systems, activities, the material world, and politics, i.e. all the other aspects above (Agar 1994; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Carbaugh 1996; Gee 1992, 1996; Hanks 1996; John-Steiner, Panofsky, and Smith 1994; Palmer 1996; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Sperber and Wilson 1989; Toolan 1996).

- All these aspects together constitute a system (an interrelated network) within which each of the components or aspects simultaneously gives meaning to all the others and gets meaning from them.

### 10

- That is, we have another form of reflexivity here, as well. For a shorthand, let us call this system the “situation network.”

### 11

- Situations are never completely novel (indeed, if they were, we wouldn’t understand them).
• Rather, they are repeated, with more or less variation, over time (that is, distinctive configurations or patterns of semiotic resources, activities, things, and political and sociocultural elements are repeated).

بالأخرى يتم تكرارها، مع تباين أكثر أو أقل، مع مرور الوقت (وهذا هو، ويتكرر تشكيلات مميزة أو أنماط من موارد السيميائي، وأنشطة، الأشياء، وعناصر سياسية واجتماعية وثقافية).

• Such repetition tends to “ritualize,” “habitualize,” or “freeze” situations to varying degrees, that is, to cause them to be repeated with less variation (Douglas 1986).

مثل تكرار يميل إلى ""ritualize، habitualize، أو ""تجميد"" حالات بدرجات متفاوتة، وهذا هو، لحملهم على أن يتكرر مع اختلاف أقل (دوغلاس 1986).

12- Such repetition (e.g. imagine the old style spelling bee or the traditional doctor–nurse–patient relationship around a hospital bed)

مثل التكرار (مثل تخيل نمط قديم لنحل أو علاقة تقليدية بين الطبيب والممرضة والمريض حول سرير المستشفى)

• is the life blood out of which institutions, such as distinctive types of schools, hospitals, businesses, industries, government agencies, political parties, street gangs, academic disciplines, colleges or college classrooms, and so on and so forth through a nearly endless list, are created. Institutions, in turn, create forces (e.g. laws, disciplinary procedures, apprenticeships, etc.) that ensure the repetition and ritualization of the situations that sustain them.

هو شريان الحياة لأي مؤسسات، مثل أنواع مميزة من المدارس والمستشفيات والشركات والصناعات والوكالات الحكومية والأحزاب السياسية وعصابات الشوارع، التخصصات الأكاديمية والكليات أو الفصول الدراسية في الكلية، وهكذا دواليك من خلال قائمة لا نهاية لها تقريباً يتم إنشاؤها. المؤسسات، بدورها، إنشاء قوات (مثل القوانين والإجراءات التأديبية، والتمكذنة المهنية، الخ) التي تضمن التكرار من الحالات التي تحافظ عليها.

• Studying the way in which situations produce and reproduce institutions, and are, in turn, sustained by them, is an important part of discourse

دراسة الطريقة التي تنتج وأعادا أنتاج لأوضاع المؤسسات، وبدورها، التي لحقت بهم، هو جزء مهم من الخطاب.